

THE BLUE RIDGE VOICE

SUMMER 2023

GREETINGS FROM THE MOUNTAIN!



When I hear the word summer not only do I think YMCA Blue Ridge's pinnacle season but also longer days, travel, sunrise hikes, servant leadership, blue skies, swimming, ice cream, gorgeous sunsets, bonfires, fellowship, mountain views, humidity, creaking, green rocking chairs, growth, sunshine, laughter, connection, friends that are like family, fun, discovery and impact.

As many of you know, my husband and I have two kids, Colin (14) and Bailey (12). We have a teen and a tween! It's a pivotal stage with so many things going on – mentally, emotionally and physically. They are simple, yet complicated. This summer both kids spent 4 weeks at separate overnight camps. We were intentional because we want our kids to have a space where they feel comfortable and supported; a place where they can make friends from all over the country, set goals and strive to achieve them, create memories, enjoy the great outdoors and escape technology. **We want them to have a home away from home.**



During Colin's first summer he wrote this to his grandmother, Mimi, "I shot a rifle today. You would think it is fun, but it's not. Love, Colin" His second summer, he earned the EXPERT rank in riflery! He also attempted sailing during his second summer, and it didn't go well. He became scared. As we were talking about his goals for this summer, I asked about sailing and power boating (USPB). He said no, he couldn't. He was still scared and didn't feel like he could overcome it. We discussed the importance of perseverance with a reminder of his Mimi note. Guess what happened?

7/24/23

It's now the 2nd week! It feels like I've been here for weeks. But I'm having fun. This afternoon I'm going to get my sunfish skipper. I'm still going for my USPB.

7/20/23

I got my sunfish skipper, and I'm not really afraid anymore. I'm going to start my outboard skipper class then I should have my USPB by the end of the 3rd week. I'm having a lot of fun.

7/31/23

It's crazy the 3rd week! Today I am starting USPB! I'm really excited. If I pass I can drive all boats up to 65ft in length. Also sailings not scary anymore and I'm having fun doing it.

8/7/23

Three more days! I hope you all had a fun time without me. I'm having fun powerboating with my USPB and sailing with friends.

The goal for Bailey was to stay all four weeks (seriously.) The drop off was rough with so many tears.

Bailey did it! She experienced all four weeks. She focused on having fun – enjoyed fishing the most – and made lots of friends. I learned all this **at pick up** because her notes home didn't say anything about having fun, friends or fishing. My heart swelled with love, pride and gratitude because of their accomplishments. **Sending our kids to camp is an investment in who they are, who they will become and in their future.**

In reflecting on this past summer at YMCA Blue Ridge – **It was extraordinary!**

Each week, I greeted those returning to the Mountain by saying **WELCOME HOME!** For first timers, I shared our wish that each time they passed through the gate, they would want to roll down their windows to smell the fresh mountain air; they would feel the burdens the world places on them sluff off and they would feel like this is a home away from home. **The campus was organized chaos with kids, teens, adults and families.** Parents felt safe letting their kids run and explore the creeks and trails. Teens met other teenagers from different cities, states and regions; barriers and stereotypes were broken as they realized they have more in common with each other than differences. Caring adults shepherded conversations focused on leadership, character and values. Young people learned empathy, responsibility, accountability, and how it feels to belong. **EVERYONE had an opportunity to unplug from technology and sit in a rocking chair talking with a new friend or catching up with an old one.** The days were filled with laughter, fun, growth and discovery.

The time I've spent at Blue Ridge has changed my life forever.

Experiences like these are an investment. When parents send their teenagers to YMCA Blue Ridge, it is an investment. When families choose YMCA Blue Ridge, it is an investment. It is an investment in who they are, who they will become and in their future. **We know this and are committed to the work.**

As we look ahead, there is so much more work we want and need to do. **Please know that YOU help us do this work with your support! Thank you for investing in YMCA Blue Ridge.** For this and so much more, we are grateful.

With gratitude, awe and joy,

Melissa

Melissa Bailey Logan
Chief Executive Officer
YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly



HALL OF FAME 2023

The YMCAs of the Southeast Hall of Fame is hosted annually at YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly. It serves as a forum to recognize YMCA professionals and volunteers who have devoted their lives to serving others – **making a positive impact on individuals, on their community and on the YMCA movement throughout the Southeast.**

The individuals who will be inducted this year are no exception. We are excited to announce the **Class of 2023:**



**Fred
Ashford**

YMCA of
Greater Charlotte



**Andy
Calhoun**

YMCA of
Greater Charlotte



**Colquitt
Clark**

YMCA of
Tuscaloosa



**Charles
Cleveland**

Y-USA South Field



**Susan
Landergan**

YMCA of
Central Virginia



**Jim
Woods**

YMCA Blue Ridge
Assembly

STRENGTHEN THE FAMILY, STRENGTHEN THE CHILD

Our fourth summer of Family Camp provided families the opportunity to relax, recharge and reconnect. Family Camp is an important element of our youth development work, representing our belief that if you strengthen the family, you strengthen the child. **Children and teens depend on strong, healthy families to become values-driven leaders.**

More families than ever attended Family Camp! This summer we saw parents and kids accompanied by grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends. Because of this growth, **this year we were able to add a second summer session** – that means more laughs, more memories and more time to grow together.

“The fellowship my family experienced with the other families is unparalleled,” said one of our Family Camp participants. **“My son is very reserved and shy, but the dynamic group of families assisted and supported him enough that he conquered his fears and climbed the indoor climbing wall. I could not hold back the tears. After Family Camp, we felt just blessed and blown away.”**

We hope you and your family will join us for Thanksgiving Family Camp!

For more information and to register, visit blueridgeassembly.com/family-camp.

Thanksgiving Family Camp
November 22–25,
2023



ADVANCING TEEN WORK



Formerly the Youth Development Summit, **Teen Staff Academy has been designed to meet the needs of staff who want to build a stronger foundation for their work with teens.**

The key focus of Teen Staff Academy is learning and discussing the core principles of three important YMCA programs – **Achievers, Leaders Club and Youth in Government**. For staff looking to start one of these programs at their local Y, Teen Staff Academy is an invaluable resource. The Academy offers fundamentals such as program budgeting, marketing, resources and staffing as well as peer networking opportunities.

Teen Staff Academy will take place **November 13 – November 16**. Total cost to attend is \$475 per person for a single occupancy room or \$350 for a double occupancy room.

To register for this year’s Teen Staff Academy, visit us online at blueridgeassembly.org/etn/teen-staff-academy-2023. For any questions, contact Greg Hall via email at greghall@yblueridge.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

YMCA Alumni 2023

October 23–25 , 2023

Teen Staff Academy

November 13–16, 2023

Thanksgiving Family Camp

November 22–25, 2023

YMCA Principles and Practices

December 13–14, 2023

Campfire Conference

January 21–24, 2024

YPN Conference

March 20–22, 2024

Summer Family Camp Session 1

June 8–13, 2024

Blue Ridge Leaders' School Session 1

June 15–22, 2024

Fellowship of Christian Athletes Camps

June and July, 2024

Youth Conference on National Affairs

June 29–July 5, 2024

Camp China

July 5–8, 2024

Christian Values Conference

July 14–19, 2024

Forest Hill Camp Rock

July 16–20, 2024

Blue Ridge Leaders' School Session 2

July 20–27, 2024

Y Achievers Summit

July 28–August 1, 2024

Summer Family Camp Session 2

July 28–August 2, 2024

Global Leadership Summit

August 1–2, 2024

Please remember YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in your estate plans.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE



YMCA World Urban Network

YMCA Blue Ridge had the honor of hosting the World Urban Network for its 2023 CEO & Leadership Conference. **In the 45 years that the World Urban Network has held this conference, this year marked only the fifth time it has taken place in the United States.**

The YMCA World Urban Network includes YMCA General Secretaries/Chief Executives and senior leadership from cities around the world who are committed to advancing the Y's mission, leadership development and international collegiality.

The conference was a tremendous success, strengthening current partnerships and establishing new ones. **80 YMCA professionals from 25 countries around the world** attended informative workshops and engaged in meaningful conversations about their work. They discussed international causes and areas of need along with strategies for how the Y movement around the world can work to address them.



Among the events was the dedication of two “Peace Poles” which were erected on the east side of Eureka Hall, near the location where the “Eureka Tree” climbed by Blue Ridge founder W.D. Weatherford once stood. **Inscribed with the phrase “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in 16 languages, these Peace Poles represent the worldwide movement for peace.** The ceremony highlighted the work being done by the gathered YMCA professionals around the world.

Since its founding, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly has brought young people from different backgrounds and cultures together to learn from each other, grow their talents and tackle important issues of the day. These two Peace Poles now stand in this historic place to serve as a reminder of humanity's hope for a future filled with compassion, empathy, understanding and unity.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Investing in Young Leaders

When teens come to YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, they have character-building, positive experiences that shape their future. At the **Y Achievers Summit**, teens attend life skills workshops, engage in group initiatives and learn about college and career paths. **Blue Ridge Leaders' School** emphasizes personal leadership development and take-home application to the home YMCA. Leaders take courses on topics ranging from aquatics to financial development, all designed to foster their leadership, character and health.



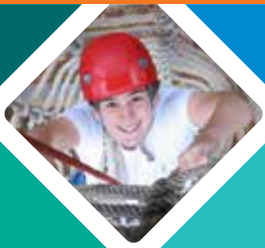
We also partner with a variety of other youth-serving organizations to hold teen conferences and camps. The **Cadet Leadership Course**, a program of the Air Force JROTC, brought cadets for the third summer. Over 100 cadets improved social skills, confidence, attention to detail and discipline by participating in the Assembly's archery and Odyssey Challenge Course programs. Buncombe County Rescue taught cadets land navigation, self-aid and survival, while leadership scenarios provided by NC A&T taught the value of strong decision-making skills.

The **Fellowship of Christian Athletes** brought its Boys and Girls Multi-Sports Camps as well as its Coaches Camp and Leadership Camp to Blue Ridge once again. FCA Leadership learned how to engage emotionally with teammates, grow in their faith and transform their communities as leaders. Coaches Camp attendees likewise became **“engaged, equipped and empowered”** to serve their teams and communities while passing along the message of Christ. This year’s theme, **“GREATER,”** encouraged teen athletes and coaches alike to seek greater purpose beyond trophies and praise – to become GREATER in Jesus Christ as written in John 3:30: **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”**

Summer is also when Blue Ridge is actively shepherding leaders of our own. Our 80 summer employees gained valuable hands-on experience that will empower them to enter the workforce with confidence. This program exemplifies YMCA Blue Ridge's founding principles, **teaching the next generation there is dignity in labor** and anything that ministers to human need is a God-given responsibility.



I wanted to reach out and thank you



I am writing to express my deepest gratitude

Every year we receive letters and notes written by youth, teens and adults. **These letters come to us, but they were written to you.** That's why we'd like to share some excerpts with you here, in the handwriting of their original authors.

I find that I can
really be myself here

When you give to Blue Ridge, you become an important part of a journey that transforms the lives of young people and their families. We witness moments of transformation every day – a middle school student discovers a love of nature while exploring the streams; a teen attending a conference finds their voice within a supportive community of peers; a family has the chance to reconnect while they hike to a lookout.

Because of you, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly is making a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thank you from the
bottom of my heart for the
financial support that allowed
me to come to this mountain.

These heartfelt letters are a reminder that for many of the youth and teens who come to Blue Ridge, their summer experience would not have happened if not for the generosity shown by people like you.

However, while we are heartened by these notes of gratitude, we acknowledge that **there are still young people whose chance to learn, play and grow at the Mountain has yet to come.**

it is because of all of you
that I am able to
experience this magic.

Together, we have the power to bridge this gap and ensure that no one is left behind. Your continued donations can make the Mountaintop experience a reality for even more youth, teens, adults and families.

Help a young person begin their journey of transformation today by filling out the card included with this newsletter, by making a gift at blueridgeassembly.org/donate, or contact Suzette Armatas at sarmatas@yblueridge.org to make an ongoing commitment to this life-changing work through one of our giving societies.

We couldn't do it without
the help of donors like you.
★ You are a SUPERSTAR ★

